LAVAGETTO, Ed
Italians
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OAKLAND NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY PROJECT

Interview Data, cont.
Ed Lavagetto

Estimated Time on Tape	Contents
	Women did cannery work. Pacific Coast Canning Company operated by Chinese. Grondona brothers discussed, vegetable gardeners. Genoveses outside of West Oakland settled in Alameda. Commission House business.
10 - 15 minutes/ 105 - 165 counter	Italians in California discussed. Southern Italians in West Oakland lived below 7th Street. Women tied up to kitchen. Move out of West Oakland into better homes. Sign of affluence was large basement for wine.
15 - 20 minutes/ 165 - 235 counter	Wooden bridge at end of 14th Street led to city dumps. Father came in early 1900s, both parents from Genoa, father brought wife out in 1906. Lived in Alameda first. Father was garbageman, later became a stockholder in Scavenger Company. Social activities recalled -- Portuguese more active. Portuguese funerals recalled. Moved to Temescal around 1919. 16th Street paved. Peralta still a dirt street.
20 - 25 minutes/ 235 - 310 counter	Circus came, paraded down Peralta. California Door Company -- steam factory. Mothers dominant in church. St. Patrick's and St. Joseph's Church recalled. Italian cooking discussed.
25 - 32 minutes/ 310 - 430 counter	Did shopping on 7th Street and 6th Street Market. Recalls Crestetto and Rattos. Cows and goats milked north of 18th Street. Stoves heated with wood. Saturday nights for baths. Linen hung out window during the week.
Side 2 0 - 5 minutes/ 0 - 50 counter	Prejudice between different groups of Italians. Strong provincialism. Genovese labelled "Jewish bankers" by Piedmontese. Had to be Genovese to be a stock holder in Oakland Scavenger Company. Southern Italians distinguished by garlands of garlic and red peppers hung on front porch. Italian cooking discussed.
5 - 10 minutes/ 50 - 100 counter	Not conscious of distinctions between ethnic groups til later. (Except for Hawaiin boy and Chinese boy. Benevolent Club, Cristoforo Colombo Club recalled.

Interview Data, cont.
Ed Lavagetto

Estimated Time on Tape	Contents
	Social clubs discussed -- Ligure Club in North Oakland, Colombo Club, Liberty Club, and Fratellanza Club in "Butcher Town", also called Golden Gate area, near 62nd Street.
10 - 15 minutes/ 100 - 160 counter	Piedmontese in water company. Lived on 18th Street in West Oakland. Other communities discussed: Portuguese in Watts Tract, Japanese in West Berkeley, Portuguese on 23rd Avenue, Germans on Fruitvale Avenue. Moved to North Oakland at 46th and Grove. Many Italians moved to Temescal. Better homes.
15 - 20 minutes/ 160 - 225 counter	North Oakland discussed. Many Italians preferred St. Joseph's Church to St, Patrick's because of the old country Portuguese atmosphere at St. Joseph's with Father Galli. Irish considered non-European. Recalls influenza epidemic after WW I.
20 - 25 minutes/ 225 - 300 counter	Recalls WW I -- "liberty steak" instead of hamburger because of dislike for Germans. Recalls school during WW I -- collected peach and apricot pits. Grew victory gardens.
25 - 30 minutes/ 300 - 385 counter	Teachers told students not to eat so much salami. Mother went to school to become a citizen. Father never became citizen of U.S. Education not as important as having healthy children and security. Recalls 6th Street Market.
30 - 32 minutes/ 385 - 430 counter	Moved to Temescal and shopped at Genova Delicatesse
End of Interview	

OAKLAND NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Ed Lavagetto, Interview 1
Date of Interview: 27 August 1981; Oakland, California
Interviewer: Sally Thomas
Transcriber: Sally Thomas
Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Lavagetto: The boundaries of West Oakland, the way I knew it as a little boy -- first of all I realize that memory is going to play some tricks on me. Things that I tell you may not be exactly true, but West Oakland as I knew it as a boy was west of Adeline to the bay. And when I say the bay I mean which is now the army base -- that at one time was the bay. The shore went right up to the railroad tracks. And then from about 2nd and 3rd Street up to about 18th Street was the West Oakland that we knew, and north of 18th Street was industrial lots, but they were vacant. So the West Oakland that I knew was this one particular area.

Thomas: When was this?

Lavagetto: I was born in 1908, so, I would say, when I become aware, when I was five, six years old. I would say 1914 -- the start of the World War I. And the Italians that I associated with or knew were one particular dialect, a Genovese dialect, the Italians from Genoa, also called Liguria. The Ligurians were called Genoveses, also pronounced with a "Z", Zenessis. That's the way they called themselves. The dialect of the Zenessis, the Genoveses, was a spoken language, not written. It was a language that was entirely different from the other city-states. You know how Italy was composed of city-states, walled cities. Genoa was a walled city. So the particular dialect that they had was different from the

Lavagetto, cont: other dialects. In other words, a Genovese would have trouble understanding a Sicilian, and vice versa. And the Venetians were entirely different. And the Romans, the Florentines . . . Anyway, this particular area in West Oakland, I would say from about 14th Street up to 18th Street, in the vicinity of Peralta Street, was this little group of Genoveses that I knew. Of course West Oakland had its Portuguese; it had some Irish. The blacks were a very, very small minority then, very, very small, because they lived down at the Point -- at 8th, 7th, 6th, and Henry -- way down at Pine Street. They were the Pullman porters from the railroads. I went to grammar school at Prescott School, and I would say it was 95, 98% white, or children of the immigrants. There was a colony, a group or area, of the Jewish, but they lived on the other side of Adeline. We wouldn't consider them West Oaklanders.

This little group of Italians, mostly, (sigh), there was many of them that were independent garbage collectors. They owned their wagon, and their horses, and some homes had stables. I would say that most of the Italians rented that property. Where they lived they rented. They were more concentrated around 16th Street, this one particular dialect, the Genoveses. Of course they all did menial work, all of them.

Thomas: What types of work?

Lavagetto: Whatever they could find. The most thing that I remember was that they were garbagemen, independent. Later on the independent garbagemen incorporated, and they formed what they called the Oakland Scavenger Company. This was, I would

Lavagetto; cont: say, after 1918. I'm not positive about these dates. Anyhow, the work that the women did was mostly, if they could find work, cannery work. There was a cannery at the foot of 12th Street, which would be 12th and Wood. The Pacific Coast Canning Company, which was operated by the Chinese.

A few of the Italians worked in the vegetable gardens, also. There was one prominent family in West Oakland called the "Grandonas". They had one garden at 15th and Willow, between 15th and 16th. And they had one at 12th and Wood. They also had a large garden in the town of San Pablo. There was two or three brothers, the Grandonas. (Interviewer's comment: Mr. Lavagetto pronounced this "Grandona", but he is referring to the Grondona family.)

Most of the Genoveses outside of West Oakland were settled in Alameda. They had a few farms in Bay Farm Island -- we called them "truck gardens" then. They also were in a Commission House business down at the foot of Franklin Street. If you go down there today you'll see some of the old Genovese families in there -- the Cotellos and others, I've forgotten their names. It seemed that the Genoveses moved toward agriculture. And they were dispersed over all Central California. You could find them in Stockton, San Jose, Pittsburgh, and Martinez.

But getting back to the different dialects, it's a strange thing -- they seemed to group together and they seemed to do the same type of work. For example, the Sicilians and the Neopolitans seemed to get into the fishing. You'd find a lot of Sicilians and Neopolitans at the town of Pittsburgh, Antioch. (I think Pittsburgh at one time was called "Black Diamond".) And they were salmon fishermen. And the Sicilians,

Lavagetto, cont: you'd also find them in Monterey and in San Francisco. The Piedmonteses, which is another dialect that comes from Milano in Italy, they seem to go into the janitorial, window washing type of work. They also worked for the water company. A lot of Piedmonteses worked for the water company. The water company at that time was the "People's Water Company" in Oakland, if memory is not tricking me. They did a lot of janitorial work.

You would find little shoe-shine stands in Oakland and in San Francisco operated by the Neopolitans. The Neopolitans and the Sicilians lived below 7th Street, on 5th, 3rd, and 4th. There was also a cannery down there at the foot of Myrtle Street which was operated by the California Packing Corporation. A lot of the women worked there, a lot of the immigrants' wives. There was also a California Packing Cannery at the foot of Park Street in Emeryville. In fact there was two canneries down there that the women in the seasonal work, in the summertime, worked.

Also in San Francisco, North Beach, the fishing was taken over by the Neopolitans and the Sicilians. And the Genoveses moved into the restaurant business. The Italian housewife at that time, as I knew them, were expected to work when work was available. But they were also tied to the kitchen. They were expected to take care of the children, and cook the dinners. The men, now that I look back, their attitude was that their primary objective was to earn money. Later on, as they moved out of West Oakland, they moved into better homes. An indication of affluence was to have a home that had a large basement where they could make their own wine. They brought the old country attitude about mothers and wives. And, like I say, in the summer-

Lavagetto, cont: time they were expected to work. When the women worked in the cannery, especially the one at the foot of 12th Street, they were paid by the piece work. They were paid so much for a box of peaches. And it was hard, long hours.

Also, I might mention, I'm kind of jumping ahead of myself, but at that time 14th Street had a wooden bridge that went out into this little bay, and at the end of this bridge was the city dumps. That's where a lot of the city garbage was dumped.

Anyway, most of the children my age went to school speaking just the language [of] their parents. I think we kind of sensed that we were different than other people. We kind of sensed it but we didn't know why.

Thomas: When did your father come from Italy?

Lavagetto: My father came in the early 1900s, I would say around 1900. Both my parents were from Genoa. They were from the outskirts of Genoa. My father came here as a married man, but he stayed here a few years and earned enough money to go back and bring my mother over here, about 1906. My father arrived with my mother right after the San Francisco earthquake. San Francisco burnt down.

Thomas: Were they living in San Francisco first?

Lavagetto: No. They lived in Alameda first and then moved to Oakland, then eventually moved to what we call Temescal.

Thomas: What did your father do?

Lavagetto: My father was an independent garbageman. Later he become a stockholder when they organized and formed this corporation.

I don't remember too much of the social activities of the Italians in West Oakland. I remember picnics at the Shellmound Park in Emeryville. I remember going to Niles

Lavagetto, cont: by steam train for picnics. They weren't as well organized for social activities as the Portuguese. There was a large group of Portuguese in West Oakland, and they were very well organized. They had their religious festivals and their social gatherings. One social gathering was called the shamarita, and the other one was called something like we'd call a barbeque cook-out, where they cooked all this food. The Portuguese had the old country way of conducting funerals. I remember they hung the black wreaths on the doors of the family that had a deceased. They had a band that would march in front of the hearse. Of course the hearses were all horse-drawn at that time.

Thomas: Did other people take part in these celebrations or ceremonies?

Lavagetto: You have to understand that I'm eight or nine years old. I'm just a little boy. I'm hanging onto some of these memories.

Thomas: When did you move from West Oakland?

Lavagetto: Oh, about 1919. We moved up to Temescal. West Oakland at that time had dirt streets. Everything was horse-drawn. All the deliveries were horse-drawn. They would go up and down Peralta Street watering the dust down. I remember 16th Street when it was paved. To us that was something, you know. 16th Street was a main street to the Southern Pacific depot. As a boy I remember the circus. The circus would stop at 3rd and down there at the railroad tracks, 3rd and Myrtle or one of those streets down there. And then they would walk the big animals, like the elephants, the camels, the hippos, up Peralta to 45th and San Pablo in Emeryville. That was the circus crowns.

Lavagetto, cont: That was quite an event as a little boy to see the circus come up Peralta! That was fascinating!

When I was born was the Steam Age, the steam locomotive. Factories were operated by steam. All the lathes, . . . In fact on Wood Street between 16th and 14th was the California Door Company that hired a lot of workers. They had their steam boiler, their steam plants, and at 12 o'clock you'd hear the whistle. One o'clock you'd hear the whistle. Five o'clock was quitting time. That was the steam age. I saw the transition to the Electrical Age and finally to the Space Age. I saw quite a change in our country.

Thomas: What did the Door Company manufacture?

Lavagetto: They manufactured doors and window sash. The window frame, glass at that time was called "sash" -- window sash door frames.

Thomas: Did Italians work there?

Lavagetto: Yes, immigrants worked there. I don't know what the prevailing wages were, but I would say they were very poor -- maybe 25, 30 cents an hour. And I don't know the hours.

Let's see, what more can I tell you about that area? If you want to I could take you down there sometime and I could show you all of these things.

The family life as far as the parents were concerned, the mothers were dominant in the activity of the church. There was two churches in West Oakland. There was St. Patrick's at 9th and Campbell, between Peralta and Campbell. And there was the dominant Portuguese St. Joseph's Church at 8th and Chestnut.

Of course the Genoveses made a big thing out of their religious holidays. Easter was very prominent in their social life.

Lavagetto, cont: Christmas -- cooking was preparing the whole week ahead of time. One of the things that was prominent in the Easter festival was the cooking of the goat kid, "crevetto", which means little goat.

As far as their eating habits were concerned, of course, as you know, it was the pasta. We ate like the peasants would in Italy, the traditional cooking of the Genoveses, which was polenta (corn meal); a lot of pasta. There was a lot of soup made with vegetables. They call it minestrone now. A lot of broth -- they would buy cheap grades of soup bone with some meat on it and make a broth, then add the pasta to it. I think later on as they moved up to Temescal their cooking habits increased where they ate better.

Thomas: Where did you do your shopping for food?

Lavagetto: Seventh Street was the main mercantile area for West Oakland. It ran from Downtown Oakland right to the Point. Where the immigrants did most of their shopping, they went down to the 6th Street Market. The freeway is passing over it now. There's a Housewives Market on 9th Street, but that's mostly for the blacks and Filipinos and the Mexicans now. But at one time the Italians went down to the 6th Street Market which took up a whole city block. There was also two places of business on Washington Street where they bought their pasta, their cheeses, and some of their goodies. One is still in existence, which is Ratto's. There was another one that was a block further south, or towards 7th or 6th, I'm vague on this, called "Crestetto". Of course also down there, there was a hay and grain store where they bought their feed for the chickens. Some had chickens, some had rabbits. And also in these vacant

Lavagetto, cont: lots north of 18th Street in West Oakland -- there was a lot of vacant industrial lots -- there was an occasional cow, and sometimes you'd see goats. People would milk the goats. They just tied them up in these lots and brought 'em in in the evenings.

Of course at that time all the stoves were heated with wood. They cooked by wood stove. And I remember the Portuguese going down to the shore for their drift wood. That was their supply of heat. Our home at that time was lit by gas lamps in the kitchen, pipes coming out of the wall that had a little valve that we'd turn on.

I think it was customary, too, at that time, Saturday nights was the night for the baths. I don't think the immigrants bathed more than once a week. I remember the three boys in the kitchen in the wash tub. My mother would heat the water. I was the oldest, and I got the clean water. The third brother got the worst! (laughter) I also remember that during the week the housewives would hang the linen, the bedsheets, out the windows. They would expose them to the sunlight. And I can understand why now, because, you know, the bathing habits, . . .

Thomas: It sounds like there were clear definitions for where the Genovese lived in this area.

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

Lavagetto: Oh yes, yes. The different dialects had strong prejudice. There was a lot of provincialism. One felt superior to the others. The Piedmontese would refer to the Genovese as the "Jewish bankers", the "Jewish money grabbers". The Northern Italians looked down on the Sicilians and the Neopolitans as inferiors. In fact, in order to become a stockholder in the Oakland Scavenger

Lavagetto, cont: Company, you had to be a Genovese. There was one or two exceptions where an outside dialect got into the company, but you had to be a Genovese. It was a very closed corporation.

Thomas: So there were a lot of Italians from the South, Sicilians and Neopolitans?

Lavagetto: The Neopolitans that I knew, Sicilians, were down below 7th Street. There was one way that I knew that there were Neopolitans living there, or Sicilians, was that, about this time of the year they would have hanging on their front porch garlands of garlic and red peppers. That was the traditional way from the old country. They loved especially the red peppers. The Southern Italians' cooking was more based on a tomato. The Italians later on as they become more affluent, the Northern Italians use a lot of butter. Of course each dialect had its different type of cooking. The Southern Italians because of Southern Italy being so sparce agriculturally, they depended more on tomatoes. Northern Italians were close to Switzerland, and they had more butter in their cooking. The Piedmonteses at one time was under the province of France -- I think it was, I've forgotten . . . Napoleon III -- and they had some of the French cooking. They still have some of their French accent to their cooking. The Genovese's cooking was more concentrated on polenta and seafood. They also had the pesto. Have you come across pesto? That's basilico, basil. Yes, there's a difference in Italian cooking. The Bologneses considered themselves the best cooks in Italy. The Venetians had a lot of fish in their diet -- mussels; what they call "scampis", which we call shrimp.

Thomas: You went to Prescott School. Were there Southern Italians going to school there, too?

Lavagetto: Yes, oh yes.

Thomas: Were you friends with them?

Lavagetto: I wasn't conscious of any distinction. The only time I was conscious of a difference in the children that attended the class was that there was one boy from the Hawaiin Islands, and I thought he was different. And of course I was aware of one boy that was Chinese. But as being conscious of different races and different ethnic backgrounds, I acquired that later in high school and grammar school. That was brought out to me later. We were a happy little environment down there -- not conscious of anything down there. We realized that we were poor, but as far as being different, I was never aware of that.

Thomas: What about the different social clubs? There was the Ligure Club . . .

Lavagetto: Oh that come later. At that time there was a benevolent society that I remember -- there might have been others, I think there was the Druids -- but at that time there was the Christopher Colombo that was a benevolent society where you paid so much, and if you were sick you got two or three dollars a week. But the Ligure Club later on which was organized in North Oakland, which we call Temescal, that was strictly a Genovese dialect superiority business, "We are Ligurians."

Also the Piedmonteses formed their own club -- they formed two social clubs. There was one down at 43rd and Adeline called the Liberty Club. And there was also one formed at 48th and Broadway which was the Colombo Club at one time, and that eventually moved to 55th and Claremont.

There was also another social club formed in the,what we called at that time,the Golden Gate area, or "Butcher Town".

Lavagetto, cont: There was a little pocket of Italians that lived around Stanford and San Pablo -- 60th and that way. There was a little pocket of Genoveses in that area, too, that lived there. Later on there was a Fratellanza Club formed, about 62nd . . .

Thomas: And that was Piedmontese?

Lavagetto: No, there was no distinction at that time. There was none of this provincialism.

Thomas: Was there distinction made in the Christopher Colombo Club?

Lavagetto: I'm not sure. They called it Cristoforo Colombo. Since he was Genovese it might have been a social club of Genoveses, but I'm not sure. Like I said, I'm eight, nine, ten years old, and I'm not sure of these things. I probably wasn't even interested. But I remember my father belonging to it. I think at one time when the citizens of Oakland would have these parades where all these different social organizations and labor organizations all paraded, they dressed in different uniforms. I remember my father dressing and participating in this parade.

But, yes, there was a distinction between the Genoveses. If you were working, say for example, for the water company and you was a Piedmontese and they needed help, you would ask a Piedmontese. There was a strong feeling of provincialism at that time. Later on, as I grew older, I thought it was ridiculous. I used to laugh about it, (laughter), because one group felt that they were more superior than the other. (laughter) Even today I hear traces of it. They say, "Oh, he's a Genovese. That means he has money."

Thomas: Where were you living in West Oakland? What street?

Lavagetto: 18th Street. We were living just about the north boundary of West Oakland. Beyond that towards North Oakland, there was, like I say, industrial area, many vacant lots. You could stand at 18th Street and look towards the bay and see the bay, and see Marin County. Then the next community was what they called the Watts Tract. That was dominantly Portuguese. I guess because of their language barrier they gathered together in little groups. For example, in West Berkeley there was the Japanese. Other Japanese became gardeners, you know that. Fruitvale Avenue was the Germans. The Portuguese also gathered together, formed a little colony, in the 23rd Avenue District, 23rd, East 14th. They worked at the cotton mills and the canneries. The California Packing Corporation had a big cannery there, and the cotton mills.

Thomas: Who worked at the cotton mills?

Lavagetto: I would say the Portuguese immigrants, probably some of the Germans. But Oakland, as far as I can remember, the Italians had a little colony in Temescal, a little colony which they called at that time "Butcher Town" because it had two slaughter houses -- it was also called Golden Gate. There was a group of Portuguese at Watts Tract. In West Oakland there was a little group of Italians around 16th, 14th, 18th, in that little northern part of West Oakland. The Sicilians and the Neopolitans were down below 7th Street. The Jewish people were more around 12th Street, but east of Adeline. There was a little community in there. I'm not sure about the Irish. Later on there was a lot of Slavonians in West Oakland, but I'm not familiar with the Slavonians.

Thomas: When your family moved from 18th Street you moved further north into Temescal?

Lavagetto: Yes. We waited for a while, and finally my father built a home on 46th and Grove.

Thomas: Did many other Italian families from that area move as well?

Lavagetto: Oh yes, oh yes. Their living conditions improved. New homes were built. Like I said before, homes that had a basement. The Temescal area at that time would run from north of 40th to up there where the Colombo Club is now, about 55th. Miles Avenue was very heavy with the Italians. They were between west of Broadway to about Market Street. We were considered Temescallions. Their way of living was vastly improved. They had new kitchens, new stoves, basements where they could make their wine. Just about this time of the year everybody was crushing grapes. The method at that time was to use your feet. We crushed them with our feet. Later on they became more affluent, and somebody devised an electrical crushing device. But around this time of the year -- August, September -- is when they crushed their wine. That was always a big activity with all the neighbors helping each other. But when they moved from West Oakland their living conditions increased quite a bit. They had homes that had floor furnaces, electric lights, interior bathroom. I remember in West Oakland there was a few homes that still had outside facilities. When I was a boy I remember our bathrub was made of zinc, which is like a tin. Their social activities later on were centered around the Ligure Club. Their religious activities centered around the Sacred Hearts Church at 40th and Grove Street.

Thomas: When you were in West Oakland do you remember going to St. Patrick's?

Lavagetto: Yes. (distracted)

Thomas: Did the other Italians in that area go to St. Patrick's?

Lavagetto: I'm not sure about that. I would say that they went more to the St. Joseph's Church because of the old country atmosphere and the priest, Father Galli, Portuguese. I think they related more to a non-American. And at that time we considered Irish as non-European.

Thomas: When you moved to Temescal did you keep up ties with West Oakland?

Lavagetto: No. West Oakland all-of-a-sudden become a no-man's-land, something inferior, something that wasn't as good as Temescal. Temescal was moving "up-town" you might say.

Thomas: So virtually when you moved to Temescal you severed ties with West Oakland.

Lavagetto: Yes, except a few families. The only ties that we had with a few families that stayed down there was when there was a death. Mentioning death, one of the things that I still remember that had a tremendous impact on me, a traumatic experience right after World War I, was the influenza epidemic -- people dying all around us. I was a little boy then, nine years old, but I still remember children my age dying. I recall that the hospitals were full. They turned the Oakland Auditorium into a hospital. I remember that the mortuaries had to keep the hearses out in the street because where they kept the hearse, which we call a garage now, was full of caskets. That was one of the most traumatic experiences that I relate to in West Oakland.

And the other thing, too, that I remember as a little boy was World War I, of the soldiers, the men going to world war and everybody coming down to the depot -- women screaming and hollering and fainting. I also remember the boys coming back

Lavagetto, cont: in 1918. Two vivid memories that I recall in West Oakland is the World War I and the stigma at that time towards the Germans. It was wrong to ask for a hamburger. My mother would send me to the butcher's shop and ask for "liberty steak". Anybody that had a dachshund was a traitor to the country. There was a strong feeling toward the Germans. That was part of my recollection of the World War I.

Thomas: But there were Germans in West Oakland at that time. What happened?

Lavagetto: I don't remember. I don't recall. Like I said before, I'm only nine years old. I remember school where we had to learn how to drill. They taught us how to count cadences, how to salute. Then after school we were supposed to go down and look in the gutters, and wherever, and collect peach pits or apricot pits which was turned into charcoal -- I learned later on for the filtering of the gases. They were used in the gas masks. So as children we brought to school peach pits and apricot pits, wherever we could find 'em. That was our patriotic duty.

We also had "victory gardens." Everybody had to grow some vegetables in the backyard. And West Oakland had very rich loam, mostly being covered by concrete now -- highways and freeways. But anyway, World War I and influenza was one of the biggest, strongest impacts in my memory.

Thomas: The Italians usually kept gardens, regardless of war time. But during the war everybody had a garden?

Lavagetto: Yes. It was told to us in class that we should have these victory gardens. We also had to salute the flag every morning -- patriotic. Little children were imbued by this patriotic spirit. Incidentally, when I'm speaking about West

Lavagetto, cont: Oakland, and speaking of school, across the street from Prescott School, which has been torn down, was an orphanage called the West Oakland Boys Home. That eventually moved up to Coolidge Avenue and became the Lincoln School for Boys, and that is now called the Cerebral Palsy Center. But originally that was across the street from Prescott School. It was a wooden building for orphans -- West Oakland Boys Home.

Thomas: How big was it? How many boys?

Lavagetto: It's a vague memory. I would say it was two or three stories, wooden building. That's all I can remember.

Thomas: What do you remember about your teachers at school? Were they anglo-saxon?

Lavagetto: Most of the teachers had a benevolent attitude towards us children. They sensed that we were children of the immigrants, that there was a lot of things that our parents didn't know. We still had a feeling of being inferior. That is, I did personally. But also I had a feeling that they had kind of a warm feeling towards us. They were very patient. Of course there were several teachers that were very impatient with the immigrants' children. I would say that they tried to help us, some way or the other.

I remember one teacher telling our class, and I don't know why it is that it stayed so long with me, but she told us that we shouldn't eat so much salami. Now that I look back she was trying to tell us something of diet and nutrition. I laugh about it now because we didn't have any choice as children. There wasn't any iceboxes or refrigerators. If your mother was working and you come home -- there was french bread and whatever, salami, whatever. I would say our diet was a good diet but nutritionally

Lavagetto, cont: I wouldn't say that it was bad or good because I don't remember.

Thomas: How did your parents learn to speak English? Did they go go to school?

Lavagetto: No. My mother went to school to become a citizen. My father never became a citizen. They just picked it up. My mother taught herself to read English, to read the newspaper. She was self-educated. Her English was fairly good for an immigrant. I don't recall whether they had classes for the immigrants. I don't think so. I'm not sure. They just picked it up as they went along.

Thomas: Was education stressed in your family?

Lavagetto: To be honest, I'm not sure, but I think they were more or less indifferent towards it. I think their main concern was that their children were healthy, that they had a full belly, and there was a little prosperity and a little security. And a little religious security. A lot of the Italian mothers were very devout. You know what I mean -- by attending mass regularly, all the rosary beads and all the rest of that, and observing the religious holidays.

Thomas: Let's get back to talking about the market on 6th Street. That was called the "Free Market" then? Do you remember?

Lavagetto: Today we would call it a farmer's market. It had stands of chickens. It had a lot of produce.

Thomas: It was an open-air market?

Lavagetto: No, it was an enclosed building, but it took up a whole city block. Also, the sidewalks were roofed over. And there were also stands outside. People bought potatoes by the sack.

Thomas: What type of shopping did you do at Ratto's?

Lavagetto: That was for the extra fine things -- olive oil, parmesan cheese which they would buy in blocks, the different types of pasta, the little butterflies; the different grades of corn meal. They got their dried mushrooms -- all the delicacies you might say.

Thomas: When you moved to Temescal did you still shop at Ratto's?

Lavagetto: No. That become almost extinct. Everybody did their shopping at the Genova Delicatessen. That was their main source for their extra special cooking, for the holidays. Like the prosciutto hams, the mortadella which is different types of bologne. That's what they went there more for -- for their sausages. That's what Crestetto and Ratto's were more . . . Mostly I would say they went there for their pasta, for their cheese and for their olive oil. They all bought olive oil in gallon cans. Sometimes also in five gallon cans. It was cheaper that way.

Thomas: As a child when you were going to Prescott School, who were your friends? Who were your closest buddies?

Lavagetto: Everybody. It was a big group of kids. There were no distinction . . . nationalities. They were all children. At that time I loved everybody.

End of Interview 1